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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Rural Electrification Administration

March 19, 1952

To : REA Field Representatives
From : Administrator
Subject: Action on Field Suggestions

Each of your suggestions and "gripes" from the 1951 REA field conferences has received very thorough consideration. As you know, the REA Efficiency Awards Committee, on which each division is represented, evaluates suggestions and presents its recommendations to me as to what action we should follow. I have reviewed your suggestions and the recommendations of the Committee and this memorandum indicates the action taken on suggestions made at both the Old Point Comfort (abbreviated to OPC) and the Salt Lake City (SL) conferences.

I want to commend you for the many worthwhile contributions, and I hope that you will continue to give us the benefit of your suggestions and criticisms at any time on how we can do a better job.

The answers have been grouped under appropriate headings - - Travel and Administrative Services, Personnel and Employee Relations, Internal Management and Operations, and Relations with Borrowers - - in order to assist you in reviewing and using this report.

Claude R. Wickard

TRAVEL AND ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES

Increase in per diem allowance. Removal of population differential.
(SL-A&A 3, A&L 8, Eng. 5, Mgt.1; OPC - A&A 3, Eng. 6 & 8, A&L 4)

Auditors' travel expense. (OPC - A&A 2)

Increase in maximum reimbursement rate for mileage. (SL - A&A 4, Eng. 5, OPC - Eng. 6)

All travelers were requested to submit, on an individual basis, a report of actual mileage and per diem expenses incurred during a specific travel period. An analysis is being made of this information and, on completion of the analysis, you will be notified of whatever action is taken.

Travel on Saturday, Sunday, and holidays. (400 mile mileage requirement)
Compensatory time for weekend travel and other overtime work. (SL - Eng. 4; OPC - Eng. 5. A&L 7)

The rate of 400 miles per day was established in connection with the June Field Conferences for this particular travel and as a temporary measure only. The reason for this figure was to establish some limit which could be justified as comparable to common carriage travel. In attending group meetings like these, it is customary to utilize weekends and holidays for traveling, and it was determined administratively to be a reasonable requirement.

For regular travel requirements, however, the rate of 300 miles a day is the standard rate of mileage. In connection with regular travel, the assignments scheduled by supervisory officials determine whether travel on weekends and non-work days is required in order that travelers may leave their former duty point and arrive at the next assignment on time.

Although weekend and holiday travel between duty points is on a duty status and you receive per diem for it, it is not within the regular hours of duty and therefore not subject to extra pay.

Mileage to conferences. (OPC - A&A 4)

We allowed 4¢ per mile unless you transported another REA employee, in which case 7¢ per mile was allowed in traveling to the conference. If you were going from the conference to an official duty station, 7¢ per mile was allowed for this travel. The rate of 4¢ per mile was allowed in coming to the conference on the basis of the cost to the government for similar travel by common carrier. Mileage was figured on the basis of the shortest distance between points.

Increase in travel advance to \$700. (OPC - A&L 2)

Travel advances have been increased from \$480 to \$600 per month which should provide ample funds while travel vouchers are being processed. Travellers are reminded of the importance of submitting their travel vouchers promptly and accurately in order that the processing time may be kept at a minimum.

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Processing of travel vouchers should be expedited. Before vouchers are returned exceptions and errors should be double checked. Some one from Travel Unit should attend conference to advise on travel problems (SL-Eng. 7) Notifying field people of reason for delay and when payment can be expected. (OFC - A&L 3)

All possible action is being taken to expedite the processing of travel vouchers. Currently vouchers are being processed within the standard time of 20 days from the date of receipt in the Voucher and Employee Accounts Section.

In order to assist travellers in preparing their travel vouchers, a memorandum was issued on November 21, 1951, by the Accounting and Auditing Division on "Travel and the Preparation of Travel Vouchers". This should be particularly helpful in clarifying several common travel questions and in showing travellers how to prepare vouchers in such a way as will facilitate administrative and audit review and thus permit more prompt payment.

A representative from the Accounting and Auditing Division to advise on travel problems was present at both of the field conferences and also several of the interim conferences since that time. It is planned that a representative will be present at future field conferences.

Deductions made in mileage. (SL-Mgt. 2)

Where travellers' mileage varies from that indicated on Rand McNally maps, a statement should be placed on the voucher indicating the reason for such variance. The only item which we can use for standardizing the checking of vouchers is the mileage shown on the Rand McNally maps.

Reimbursement of state tax on phone calls. (SL-Mgt. 3)

So far as we know, we do not have a comptroller general's decision on this point. However, if any traveller desires, he may make a reclaim of this type of amount deducted, and we will then obtain a comptroller general's decision and circulate this decision so that all will have the benefit thereof. This reclaim should be made on a separate voucher and may go back to any reasonable length of time. However, the traveller should be certain to support the reclaim by a receipt.

Group purchase plan for automobiles used in official travel (SL-A&L 2)

The suggestion that the possibilities of a group purchase plan for automobiles used in official travel be looked into is similar to one made a few years ago which was very carefully studied to determine whether some method could be developed to carry it out. No practical way of doing this could be found at that time.

We have reviewed these earlier efforts, and also have consulted with the Office of Budget and Finance and the Solicitor's Office to get their opinion on this matter. As a result of an exhaustive study there does not appear to be any practical method whereby this can be done as an official act of the Agency. It may be possible, however, that an employees'

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organization such as the Agricultural Employees Recreation Association can do something about this, and we are passing this suggestion along to them with the request that they look into it.

Carry-over of unused stenographic allowance. (OPC - A&L 2)

When the \$15 per month allowance for stenographic services was established, it was expected that it would not often be necessary for field men to use this much. The Voucher and Employee Accounts Section reports that there are relatively few claims for stenographic services that exceed \$10. and that claims in the full amount of \$15 are very rare. In view of this fact, it seems doubtful if a general increase in the amount allowed is necessary. If unusual conditions should make the expenditure of a larger amount necessary for some particular month, special administrative approval may, of course, be requested, preferably in advance. In view of the above, the cost of maintaining records on carry-over of unused stenographic allowance would not be warranted.

That upon request of traveler the travel section provide routing of travel to conferences where allowed mileage is restricted. (OPC - Eng. 4)

We do not have personnel available to comply with such requests and generally travellers are more familiar with the areas which would be involved and thus better able to ascertain the shortest, most practical route to be travelled. However, where there are particular problems, the travel section will attempt to give whatever assistance it can.

Running conference program as scheduled. Additional five minutes stretch period every hour. (OPC - Eng. 7)

Arrangements for next year's conference -- locations and order of occurrence. (SL-Mgt. 5; OPC - A&A, Eng. 1, A&L 9 & 10)

It is our intent that the field conference programs be carried out with the best interest of the field staff in mind. To this end the committee in charge of arrangements for next year's field conferences has been requested to keep these suggestions in mind when planning future programs.

PERSONNEL AND EMPLOYEE RELATIONS

Objection to reduction in leave and the establishment of a deadline for taking of leave. (SL - Eng. 1)

Annual leave -- urge return to policy in effect during fiscal 1950 (OPC-A&L 6)

The objections of employees to the various restrictions on leave during the past two years have been passed on to proper authorities for their consideration. The leave law approved by Congress effective July 1, 1951, cutting annual leave of all employees to 20 days a year was repealed by the passage of a new leave law effective January 6, 1952. Therefore, all employees continued to earn annual leave at the rate of 26 days a year until January 6, 1952. On that date, employees with more than 15 years of

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combined military and civilian service will earn annual leave at the rate of 26 days a year; employees with 3 to less than 15 years of service will earn 20 days; and employees with less than 3 years of service will earn 13 days of annual leave. The provision of the law prescribing a deadline for the taking of annual leave earned during the calendar year by June 30 of the following year was also repealed by the new leave law referred to above.

Representation of field personnel on the Employee Council. (Eng. 8 SL)

REA wants the Employee Council to represent all employees. We believe that with the present organization, i.e., a representative from each Division, this can be accomplished. Effective representation of employees requires two things:

- (1) The Division Representative must receive the opinions, desires and recommendations of all employees (including field employees) of his Division.
- (2) The Division Representative must attend Council meetings and present the opinions of the people he represents.

REA does not believe that field employees are able to attend meetings of the Council sufficiently frequent to give employees adequate representation. However, it is possible for a Washington employee to represent field as well as Washington employees in his Division if all employees will pass on to him matters on which they want Council action. All employees are urged to do this.

Following this recommendation the problem was discussed with the Employee Council. The Council recognizes its responsibility and is very desirous of truly representing field employees. The group suggested that all field employees be asked to present to their Division Representatives any matters they want brought up at Council meetings.

The Council invites field employees, while in Washington, to attend its meetings. Meetings are held on the third Wednesday of each month at 2:00 p.m.

The present members of the REA Employee Council are:

Chairman: J. Howard White, Power Division

Office of Administrator
Accounting and Auditing Division
Administrative Services Division
Applications and Loans Division
Engineering Division
Information Services Division
Management Division
Personnel Division
Power Division

Donnan E. Basler, Ira Shesser
Evelyn M. Yowell, Roland Mars
Timothy Callahan, Everett Moxley
F. O. Billings, William A. Ricketts
John Soma, Don Housley
Jane Klieforth, Don Cooper
Eugene Dabney, Myrtle Brown
Madelyn Lewis, Celestine Jackson
J. Howard White, Thomas Dumphy

Ex Officia Members: Edgar F. Renshaw, Applications and Loans Division,
Member of Departmental Employee Council

Charles W. Fitch, Management Division, (alternate)

Consultant from the Personnel Division: Corrine Sutton

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Reporting overtime work (OPC - A&L 11)

All overtime work should of course be included in the reports which employees make regularly to their supervisors.

However, salary payments are made for the regular work performed during the standard work week as reported by all employees on Standard Form 1130 and for such overtime as has been authorized and approved in accordance with Administrative Bulletin No. 78.

That procedure requiring notification of change in duty status be altered. Collect telegrams should be paid by the Government. (OPC - A&L 5)

This item is still under study by the Assistant Chief in Charge of Accounts, and any action taken will be reported at a later date.

That Time and Attendance Report No. 1130 be eliminated or kept in Washington office. That employees whose salary checks are withheld be immediately notified (SL - A&L 7)

A study was made last year of our time and leave reporting system in cooperation with representatives of the Office of Budget and Finance of the Department and the General Accounting Office. On the basis of this study and experience of other agencies, it was concluded that the SF-1130 form was the most practical device for reporting time and attendance and that its use should be adopted for both departmental and field employees of REA. A memorandum from the Accounting and Auditing Division on December 26, 1951, which was sent to field employees outlined this change, and the new decentralized plan is now in operation in both Washington and the field.

In connection with the latter part of this "gripe", there are established procedures for notifying employees when and why their checks have been withheld, and assurance has been given that every effort will be made to insure prompt notification in the few instances where checks have to be delayed. To assure prompt dispatch of paychecks on time, it is important that employees correctly and accurately submit their time and attendance reports.

INTERNAL MANAGEMENT AND OPERATIONS

Employment of additional telephone personnel in the field and Washington office. (SL - A&L 6)

Employment of additional engineers and increase in the number of engineers in the field. (SL - Eng. 2; OPC - Eng. 2)

Increase in Power Use and Member Education staff. (SL - A&L 4; OPC - A&L 8)

Reductions in the staff were necessary because of the reduction in our appropriation for 1952. In view of this, the increases which you suggest are not possible at this time. Unfortunately, funds are not always available to carry out all aspects of the REA workload as well and as thoroughly as we would like. We have to do the best we can with what is made available.

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Every employee is urged to present ideas for improving our services to borrowers, for eliminating any unnecessary activities, and for operating the agency in the most efficient and economical manner possible.

Review and revision of forms and procedures. (OFC - Eng. 2)

As forms and procedures become out of date, they are revised as rapidly as possible. All forms and procedures are reviewed from time to time, and revisions are being made constantly.

In connection with a work order manual of procedure, a committee of representatives from the divisions concerned is currently working on this and is expected to complete a revision of the manual in the near future.

The Group Purchase Plan is discontinued and Engineering Memorandum 17OR2 indicates details of the action.

The large power application procedures have been revised and Engineering Memorandum 113R3 covers details of the changes.

That A&L field representatives be forwarded a copy of telephone allocations and/or recommendations; allocation letter; master budget. (SL - A&L 5)

In special instances it might be advisable for the Section Head to transmit an extra copy of the allocation and/or loan recommendation to the field staff. However, in general it is felt that this is not necessary since the Section Head sends a copy of the loan letter, budget, and any other information that is needed by the field staff in assisting the proposed borrowers.

That A&L representatives be forwarded the loan contract, notes, and mortgages to be delivered to borrowers. That he be present when loan papers are executed by the Board of Directors. (SL - A&L 3)

This suggestion has been discussed and considered in the past; however, it has been felt that an arrangement of this kind would not be practical. One disadvantage is that an additional time-consuming step would be added which would increase the number of days in getting loan documents signed and returned to REA. Another disadvantage is that since field people are in constant travel status, the prompt delivery of loan documents to them would be extremely difficult. Added to these and other possible complications is the effect of recent staff reductions. The A&L fieldman is sent a copy of the feasibility study and a copy of the loan document transmittal letter, and in special cases, he may be requested to meet with boards of directors to assist and discuss loan documents.

Request answers to specific questions asked in field reports or memoranda. (SL - Mgt. 4)

Directly after the conference and as a result of this question, definite instructions were given to all Section Heads and Washington personnel of the Management Division that they make every effort to give immediate consideration and prompt answer to all requests of the field staff. Both

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types of requests, those for information needed by field representatives and those relayed by field representatives for the information and guidance of borrowers, are to receive prompt attention, and several checks and inquiries of the field staff presently indicate that substantial improvement has been made in answering such requests.

Greater flexibility in audit production schedules. (SL - A&A 2)

These requests are reasonable and action has been instituted to care for the items mentioned. In any case, where an auditor feels he does not have sufficient time to do an adequate job, present procedure provides that he should get in touch with his section head and request the required additional time.

That number of revisions and new drawings issued by Technical Standards Division be held to a minimum. (SL - Eng. 12)

As a result of this suggestion, steps have been taken to control the number of additional drawing issued, and it is felt that this situation has improved.

Directory of field personnel. (SL - A&L 1)

Several suggestions have been received on this matter from time to time, and it was decided to issue on a trial basis a directory of field personnel, placing the responsibility on field people to advise of changes that should be made in the listings. The Stenographic Unit of the Personnel Division has assembled such a directory from information that has been sent in, and it has been distributed.

RELATIONS WITH BORROWERS

Less emphasis on publicity given solely to borrower's financial condition. More emphasis on adequate and reliable service and protection of the investment through proper maintenance. (SL - Eng. 6)

Adequate and reliable service and proper maintenance are just as important as a borrower's financial condition. Both contribute to the continuance of a successful enterprise and to the repayment of the Government loan. In the past, information on the financial condition of a borrower has been more readily available because of the monthly reports and the yearly audits. At the present time, however, information on the technical operation and maintenance of borrowers systems from the Engineering Division is being used to give more facts emphasizing the need for adequate physical as well as fiscal operation.

Raising qualifications for manager applicants. (SL - Eng. 11)

We believe that the standards which have been established for the selection of managers are adequate. The trouble arises from the fact that these standards are not always applied as rigidly as they should be in the consideration of candidates for the position of manager.

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Extension of manager's probationary period to one year. (SL -- Eng. 9)

The extension of a manager's probationary period to one year may have the effect of discouraging competent applicants from applying for such a position if they knew that it would take one year for them to qualify for appointment. One of the major problems today is the extreme difficulty that borrowers are having in attracting competent people to assume managerial duties of cooperatives. A general extension of the probationary period would make this even more difficult. However, a longer probationary period is provided in special cases where it is deemed necessary.

That field representatives of all divisions be notified of board meetings where manager applicants are to be interviewed and also be furnished a copy of minutes of the "Manager Selection Committee" meetings. (SL-Eng. 10)

The section heads of the Management Division have been instructed to notify the section heads of the other line divisions whenever a borrower is holding a board of directors meeting for the purpose of interviewing applicants for the position of manager. In this way we hope that the information will be disseminated by the section heads to their field representatives wherever they deem it is necessary or convenient for a field man to be present when applicants are being interviewed. The deliberations and recommendations of this committee are merely advisory to the Administrator. Their release to the field prior to formal action by the Administrator would serve no useful purpose. However, copies of the Administrator's letter of approval or disapproval will be made available to the respective section of the line division. The section head is expected to keep his field staff advised of development.

That requests for headquarters office equipment be given favorable action. OPC - Eng. 3)

Filing cabinets continue to be in critical demand throughout the government service, even more than last year. As a result, it would not be possible to supply all field representatives with cabinets if such requisitions were submitted. As was pointed out in the reply to a similar suggestion submitted last year, the material filed in field headquarters should not consist of official or record copies of documents and memoranda. Therefore, filing is not required and fieldmen may dispose of any such material as they see fit.

In the event, however, that some unusual condition exists which requires volume filing, a requisition for a filing cabinet should be submitted, accompanied by a full justification of such need. Each request will be given individual study based on the justification submitted.

That field engineers be permitted to discuss advantages and disadvantages of different types of conductor with the manager and assist him in the selection. (SL - Eng. 13)

In accordance with Administrative Bulletin No. 43, "It is the responsibility of the borrower, with the advice of its engineer, to determine the type of conductor to be used, having due regard for all conditions which affect the cost of construction, the cost of maintenance, and the operating efficiency of the system as a whole". No field engineer should, however, feel restricted when he is asked to give advice on the selection of conductor so long as he limits himself to facts available and not opinions.